



Worship the Lord

No. 10, November 2004

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

CONTEMPLATIVE WORSHIP BRIDGES LANGUAGE BARRIERS

This is the last in a series of five articles on contemplative worship. The term contemplative is a convenient way to describe services of prayer and meditation. It should not, however, be confused with contemplative monastic orders, Zen meditation, yoga, or New Age mental activities. These practice emptying oneself to enable a spontaneous emotional experience or to find inner enlightenment. Confessional Lutheran services, whether proclamatory or meditative, are always rooted and guided by God's Word, from which grace flows.

Lutherans need to be encouraged to pray more, and we need more opportunities for community prayer. (Review

the section on Prayer in *What Luther Says*.) Contemplative worship forms provide both motivation and opportunity. Compline (Prayer at the Close of Day) is fairly conventional in form; the interplay of spoken prayers and sung psalms will seem familiar to worshipers. Taizé elements are more unique but provide an opportunity for both shared and spontaneous prayer concurrently, as described below. The simple prayer line carried by a Taizé song guides, but does not obliterate, a deeper and individual expression to God in prayer. As one might pray a more specific thought during a petition of the Lord's Prayer, so one might pray deeper

personal thoughts while singing a simple Taizé refrain. To avoid the impression that Taizé prayer is "vain repetition" (Mt 6:7), worshipers might be coached beforehand to participate in prayer on this dual level.

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An Evening Service in Taizé Style at a WELS Retreat

By Philip Becker

Sunday morning at the annual WELS North Atlantic District Labor Day Retreat begins with outdoor worship at the side of a small lake. One hundred fifty or so gathered souls hear God's word. With prayer and praise they proclaim the goodness of the Lord and his great works among us. Since one third of the gathering speaks only Spanish, the service combines Latino songs with English songs from *Christian Worship*. The Bible readings alternate between Spanish and English. A bilingual pastor delivers the sermon, speaking first in one language and then repeating the thought in the other language. After a roast turkey dinner and an afternoon of swimming and recreation, the evening starts with a Bible or topical study and ends with a hymn sing out of the seemingly ancient TLH.

How might we end the day in fellowship and communion with God in a common worship expression without the clutter of interlinear translation? Taizé prayer seems to fit the need for a majority of the campers as a way to quietly end the day in communion with God and each other.

One of the camp's instructional buildings is dimmed. A rugged cross behind a single candelabra, lit with a spotlight, is the visual center of attention for the seated group. An electronic keyboard provides soft accompaniment for singing. Two pastors remain seated at the side, near the cross. Worshipers follow a path of luminarias into the building and take seats on simple wooden benches. A printed program gives some background on Taizé prayer and suggestions for praying in both languages. **A Service of Prayer in Taizé Style/ Servicio de Oración en el Estilo de Taizé** starts without announcement as singers join in the first song, "Wait for the Lord, Whose Day is Near / Contemplaré tu vida en mí. The Spanish speakers sing in



Spanish while at the same time the English speakers sing in English. The program gives a printed melody line with texts in both languages.

The service proceeds in this manner:

- A spoken evening prayer dialogue, first in English then in Spanish.

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- A responsorial psalm: the sung alleluia continues with a soft and wordless hum while verses are spoken in Spanish, interspersed with the repeated alleluia.
- A confessional prayer in both languages.
- The Taizé prayer “Our Darkness Is Never Darkness in Your Sight / *La tiniebla ya no es tiniebla ante ti.*”
- The Sermon on the Mount read in both languages.
- The song “Nothing Can Trouble, Nothing Can Frighten / *Nada te turba, ni te teme.*”
- A time of silence.
- The Kyrie responsorially with intercessions in English (balancing the Spanish psalm above).
- The Lord’s Prayer together in both languages.
- Two sung prayers, “Holy Spirit, Come to Us; Kindle in Us the Fire of Your Love / *Ven Espíritu de amor, ven y nos incinde tu fuego*” and “In God Alone My Soul Can Find Rest and Peace, In God My Peace and Joy / *En ti Señor, reposa todo mi ser, He sido amado por ti.*”

As worshipers depart to their beds, a few linger in front of the cross, one prayerfully touching it. One young woman got on her knees and prayed silently for a few minutes.

It is well known that the combination of melody with words uses a different part of ones consciousness than the spoken word alone.

Taizé prayer seems to fill a need in worship: how to meditate with each other in prayer within a framework of God’s Word while at the same time meditating from the heart with God. The long responsive prayers of *Christian Worship* or even community silence are only a small step to filling that need. It is well known that the combination of melody with words uses a different part of ones consciousness than the spoken word alone. For instance, some people with a speech handicap are able to communicate fluently with the addition of melody. So, it is possible and not difficult to sing a Taizé melody with its simple text and at the same time to direct thoughts to God either along the lines of the Taizé text or entirely separate from it. Perhaps not surprisingly, the blended languages do not interfere with the beauty of expression nor distract from personal prayer. The Taizé style of prayer is especially emotive in an evening setting and is an ideal thing to put into the “tape player” in your head for the night.

A few additional comments might be useful for your Taizé service planning. GIA Publications offers a rich variety of Taizé songs, anthems, and recordings. *Songs and Prayers from Taizé* is one useful title. Recordings are especially helpful for those with no previous experience with Taizé songs. All resources can be found at giamusic.com. For the bilingual service, the author combined the Spanish and English words under one melody line as permitted by the GIA license.

Not all Taizé prayer is quiet. Some selections are suitable for Sunday morning or even festival occasions. A Taizé prayer can be a fitting opening to the Sunday service for an Advent or Lenten season in



place of a gathering rite. For a contemplative service, like the one described above, speaking is best minimized. Lengthy exposition of God’s Word is better done in a different service format, but enough is used to speak comfort to the gathered souls and to center the prayer on the Savior. Although not available at the retreat, instruments or a solo voice can add much beauty and variety to Taizé expressions. The music is available in accompaniment publications.

The length of each Taizé song – the number of repetitions – should be planned in advance. A song that is too short or too long may distract from the meditation. Without solo instruments or vocal soloist, the writer recommends two to three minutes. With solo instruments to add an extra dimension, five minutes would be a practical maximum. The accompanist can gracefully transition between one sung prayer and another. A deliberate musical ritard signals the conclusion of one prayer. A new prayer can be introduced with one of the varied accompaniments available, or simply by playing the solo line softly.

An intimate setting in an enclosed space works best for Taizé prayer even though it also worked well with a congregation of 700 in a very large chapel at the 2002 WELS worship conference. Focus and light are important components, and should be planned. A candle with a bowl of baptismal water could provide a different focal point than the cross.

Readers are encouraged to offer elements of Taizé prayer to their congregations or to investigate them at a Taizé service somewhere.



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